

## “Pointing People to Jesus”

Date: Dec. 15, 2019

Place: Lakewood UMC

Text: Matthew 11:2-11

Occasion: Advent 3, Year A

Themes: Advent, Humility, Faith Sharing

A young preacher had announced to his congregation that he would be leaving the church for another call. As he was standing at the door greeting people, one of the elderly saints approached him, her eyes filled with tears. She sobbed, “Oh pastor, I’m so sorry you’ve decided to leave. Things will never be the same again.”

The young man was flattered, but was equal to the situation and took her hand in his and gently replied, “Bless you, Mrs. Jones, but I am sure God will send you a new pastor even better than I.” Mrs. Jones choked back a sob and was heard to say, “That’s what they all say, but they keep getting worse and worse.”

Pastors need to have a little humility. John the Baptist knew a thing or two about humility. He played second banana to Jesus. His entire ministry was spent pointing people to Jesus. In last week’s gospel lesson John said, “I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry.” (Matthew 3:11)

John knew the role he had to play. He was not the Messiah; he was not the Savior of the world. Instead, he pointed people to Jesus, who was and is Messiah. John’s entire ministry was pointing people to Jesus. He was not the main attraction; he was the warm-up act. He played second fiddle to the first chair of the orchestra.

But now he’s having doubts. He finds himself in the dungeon of Herod. He knows he will probably lose his life. After all, he had been critical of the king, and you don’t criticize an egomaniac without a lot of push-back.

John had a lot of time on his hands and he was wondering, “Is Jesus the Messiah? Is he the one we’ve been waiting for, or should we look for another?”

John had heard things about Jesus and what he was doing. But John still had his doubts. Jesus was not born to royalty, but to a humble maid married to a carpenter. Jesus showed no signs of being a military leader who would overthrow Rome. He acted more like a servant. He came not as a judge, but as a forgiving redeemer. He spent time with the least and the lost. He was most concerned with the powerless: the blind, the lame, the deaf, with lepers and poor people and the outcast.

John the Baptist was a bit confused about the way Jesus lived out his role as Messiah. His skepticism caused John to send one of his disciples to Jesus with the question, “Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?” He wanted to know before he died: had his ministry been in vain?

And how did Jesus answer? He quoted from the book of Isaiah, which we read earlier this morning. Jesus didn’t say, “Yes, I am.” Instead he said, “Look at the things that are happening in people’s lives because of me. Look around at what’s happening and then, decide for yourself.”

Jesus didn’t confirm or deny that he was the Messiah. He told John’s disciples what was happening in people’s lives. John would have to decide for himself.

So what did they tell John? The blind are receiving their sight. People who haven’t walked for years are playing ring-around-the-Rosie. Untouchable lepers are hugging and kissing their children. Deaf people are standing over there swapping stories. Some caskets are lying open next to

a big rock, and the formerly dead are up, walking around. That's what they report. They tell John what Jesus has been doing.

This Jesus is most definitely the Messiah. He is the One about whom Isaiah prophesied. He is the One for whom the world has waited. He is also the One who would later die on a cross and take the sin of the world upon Himself. This One, this baby born in Bethlehem, would die to be the Savior of the world. Jesus is the Good News.

John *had* done his job. He had, indeed, pointed people to the Savior of the world. And *that* is our work to do in Advent, as well as the rest of the year. Why? - Because Jesus is still bringing good news to the poor. He is still healing those who are broken. And he continues to bring those who are dead back to life. The world still needs Jesus. Amen?

Two women stopped in front of a large department store window at Christmas time, admiring the decorations the store had on display. In the midst of Santa Claus and elves, a little snow village, and lots of merchandise on display, over there in the corner was a small little Nativity scene. And one of the women remarked to the other: "What do you know about that! Even the church is trying to horn in on Christmastime."

She didn't get it. She didn't make the connection that Christmas is NOT about shopping and finding a good deal. She didn't know that the real reason for the season was the birth of Messiah. No one had pointed her to Jesus.

This is the preparation we do for Christmas – we point people to Jesus. We tell others what Christ has done for us. We tell people about what a difference Jesus' coming has made in the world. We tell people how our lives are different because of Jesus. We share our faith.

So, take a moment, and think about what Jesus has done for you. What is one thing that stands out in your mind? Answered a prayer for healing? Has he brought healing to a fractured friendship? Has he provided you with money at a time when you didn't know how you'd pay your next bill? Has he delivered from an addiction for one more day? Has he given you peace of mind in the midst of a terrible crisis? Has he forgiven you of your sins and replaced it with peace? What has Jesus done for you, lately?

I want to tell you about a former parishioner of mine; I'll call her Stephanie to protect her identity. Stephanie gave up a lifestyle of promiscuous behavior because someone introduced her to Jesus. She had been abused as a child and she desperately wanted to be loved. Since her father used her for his pleasure and told her he loved her – even though it felt disgustingly dirty and wrong and shameful – she had lived a life of promiscuity, looking for love.

She never found it until someone pointed her to Jesus, and she found a faith community who loved her unconditionally, including her past. She fell in love with this man Jesus, who loved her and forgave her. And it certainly wasn't a physical type of love. But she began to walk a new way of life – forgiven and clean. She had a newfound respect for herself, all because someone pointed her to Jesus.

I have been in countless funeral homes visiting with people grieving the loss of loved ones – mothers, fathers, children, grandparents, friends. And the ones who know Jesus still cry – they still miss their loved one – but they are also filled with hope. Their faith in Jesus and the hope of resurrection enables them to face death without fear.

I've been inside of Albion prison and seen grown men cry when they know with both their head and their hearts that their sin has been forgiven,

and the God who made them still considers them precious in his sight. And it happens because a group from the outside points them to Jesus.

Friends, despite what the atheists may try to tell you, the world is a better place because of Jesus. Think of the things that are present in our world because Jesus came to earth: hospitals, colleges, social service agencies, Erie United Methodist Alliance, City Mission, Second Harvest Food Bank. Yes, the world is better because Jesus came.

I rejoice in the miracle of modern medicine, because of scientists who are motivated out of Christian love and concern to bring healing to the sick. The hungry are being fed; the homeless are finding shelter and the lonely are being comforted. Those who are dead in their addiction are brought back to life in sobriety. Jesus is still alive and well in the world today.

What has Jesus done for you, lately? Tell someone; point people to Jesus. It's what John the Baptist did. It's what Christians are called to do. It's part of who we are. Yes, the church wants to horn in on Christmas. It's our holiday, when we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ, Messiah, Savior of the World. Amen? Amen.